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# Party Contacting, Group Identity, and COVID-19:

## An Analysis of Asian American Voter Turnout in 2020

Suzy Yi

### Introduction

Many scholars have examined what affects voter turnout rates among racial minorities compared to that of White voters. Racial minorities consistently turn out to vote in elections at lower rates than White voters. One method of combating low voter turnout is through party contacting, in which political parties mobilize people who are most likely to vote through activities such as door-to-door canvassing or individualized contact through mail, phone calls, and texts (Huckfeldt and Sprague 1992; Wielhouwer and Lockerbie 1994). However, because political parties direct their efforts towards those who are most likely to vote, they are more likely to favor White voters over minorities. As a result, minorities are often filtered out of the party contacting process (García-Castañón et al 2019; Stevens and Bishin 2011).

Although significant research details Black and Latinx voter turnout, there is a dearth of information on Asian American voter turnout (Fraga 2016b; Filer, Kenny, and Morton 1991; Rocha et al 2010). In addition, current research lacks the necessary links to explain Asian voter turnout in 2020. Asian American turnout in 2020 showed unusual voting patterns for the traditionally uninvolved racial group, increasing from 70% in 2016 to 83% in 2020 despite being consistently low in previous elections. What led to this sudden increase in voter turnout? A few studies suggest that Asian Americans who hold a pan-Asian identity are more likely to be involved in political activities (Sadhvani 2020; Chen and Nakazawa 2017). Consequently, I posit that a heightened sense of Asian racial group identity contributed to the high turnout rates for Asian Americans.

To test my hypotheses, I use American National Election Studies (ANES) data from 2016 and 2020 to study the impact of party contacting and racial group identity on

Asian American voter turnout. I conduct a series of probit regressions on self-reported voter turnout with an interaction effect between party contacting and measures of racial group identity. Voter turnout and party contacting are measured as dichotomous variables, and racial group identity is measured by an index that averages responses from four questions about group identity asked in the ANES survey. Although the relationship between party contacting and racial group identity was linear in 2016, the model shifted to a quadratic relationship in 2020. To account for the shift in the model, I added a quadratic term for racial group identity in 2020.

I find that the relationship between party contacting and racial group identity differs between 2016 and 2020. Asian Americans who were contacted by a political party and have a stronger sense of racial group identity were more likely to vote in 2016. In contrast, Asian Americans who had the strongest and weakest sense of racial group identity were more likely to vote in 2020, regardless of party contacting. Whereas the interaction between party contacting and group identity was a significant indicator of voter turnout in 2016, it was not significant in 2020. Rather, the model for Asian group identity shifted in 2020 and became a significant indicator of voter turnout in 2020. I find that Asian Americans who had the highest and lowest racial group attachment were more likely to vote in the 2020 election.

The results of the study raise questions on how the changing political and social context could affect voter turnout for different racial minorities. The shifting political context in 2020 could have contributed to an explanation for the differences in racial group identity and voter turnout compared to the data from 2016. The heavy racialization of COVID-19 likely affected the rise in racial group identity for Asian Americans, which then increased voter turnout and political participation generally. My study also suggests that further research could examine the effects of nontraditional mobilization efforts on various minority groups by considering how indicators of voter turnout likely vary between racial and social groups.

## Literature Review

### *Voter Turnout for Racial Minorities and Party Contacting*

While voter turnout rates across the United States are typically low, racial minorities are less likely to vote than White citizens in presidential elections and are often viewed as less politically active overall (García-Castañón et al 2019; Hill and Leighley 1999; Berry and Junn 2015). Political parties can pursue various strategies for electoral mobilization of minority populations, some of which can be more effective than others. However, the perception of low minority turnout often causes political parties and organizations to direct less attention to minorities in their mobilization efforts, which in turn cyclically affects low turnout rates. Various studies offer explanations for the racial discrepancy in voter turnout with suggestions on how to increase minority turnout, including greater descriptive representation of candidates for African American and Latinx populations (Rocha et al 2010; Whitby 2007; Griffin and Keane 2006) as well

as nominating minority candidates in areas that have a larger proportion of minority groups compared to the general population (Fraga 2016a; Bhatti and Hansen 2016; Oberholzer-Gee and Waldfogel 2005). Despite these mobilization efforts, racial minorities continue to fall behind White citizens in voter turnout rates.

Beyond descriptive representation and group size, political parties can contact voters to increase turnout rates. Party contacting involves mobilizing people who are most likely to vote through activities such as door-to-door canvassing, mail, phone calls, emails, texts, and social media outreach, with personal face-to-face interactions generally increasing voter turnout more than impersonal methods (Huckfeldt and Sprague 1992; Wielhouwer and Lockerbie 1994; Niven 2004; Gerber and Green 2000). Several studies on Black and Latinx voter turnout have shown that party contacting is an effective form of mobilization that tends to increase turnout rates among minorities (Philpot, Shaw, and McGowen 2009; Diaz 2012; Wielhouwer 2000). One study (Philpot, Shaw, and McGowen 2009), for example, studied the turnout and surrounding circumstances in 2008 to determine that the increase in Black turnout rates was due to increased party contacting for Black voters rather than Barack Obama's nomination alone. Minority voter turnout is more complicated than factors related to racial group identity, as seen in Obama's election in 2008. Turnout involves methods of mobilization used across social and racial groups. Party contacting is an effective method for mobilizing voters, especially those that have traditionally been ignored by parties. Political parties, therefore, have a direct role in mobilizing minority voters beyond descriptive representation.

However, the two major political parties still seem to direct less effort into contacting racial minorities compared to the heavy mobilization efforts towards White voters (García-Castañón et al 2019; Stevens and Bishin 2011). Because parties strategically use the most effective and expensive face-to-face methods to contact voters who are most likely to vote, they can often overlook racial minorities and other groups with lower turnout rates. As a result, many ethnic minorities are contacted by nonpartisan organizations more than by major political parties, which leads to varying levels of effectiveness in increasing voter turnout (García-Castañón et al 2019; Stevens and Bishin 2011; Kim 2015). Partisan contacting, however, is generally a more effective strategy in increasing turnout rates for racial minorities. I chose to study the effects of party contacting because of its effectiveness in increasing minority turnout.

Interestingly, there is a substantial dearth of information on Asian American voter turnout. Studies on voter turnout and political participation that focus on differences between races typically compare White, Black, and Latinx voters without much regard for Asian voters (Fraga 2016b; Filer, Kenny, and Morton 1991; Rocha et al 2010). Additionally, studies that focus on the political participation of either Black voters (Philpot, Shaw, and McGowen 2009; Gillespie 2015; Clark 2014) or Latinx voters (Arvizu and Garcia 1996; Highton and Burris 2002; Fraga 2016b) are common, but studies on Asian American voters are minimal compared to other minority groups. The few studies that have examined Asian American political participation generally explain low turnout as a result of low mobilization efforts towards immigrant groups and a lack of adequate descriptive representation (Kim 2015; Diaz 2012; Sadhwani 2020).

Several different factors could contribute to the lack of research on Asian American voters. Asian Americans are often viewed as less politically active than other racial groups, which leads to fewer mobilization efforts by political parties, politicians, and interest groups and thus decreases overall participation levels (Jo 1984; Diaz 2012). The model minority myth is a stereotype that portrays Asian Americans as high achievers in academics and occupations (Chou and Feagin 2015). The stereotype delegitimizes racism towards Asian Americans and could also frame Asian Americans as an unproblematic group that doesn't warrant further studies (Li and Nicholson 2021). Even within racial minorities, Asian Americans tend to be among the least politically active (Lien et al 2001; Lien 2004; Sadhwani 2020). In their mobilization efforts, parties are more likely to ignore Asian and Latinx populations because immigrant groups are associated with lower turnout rates (Kim 2015; Berry and Junn 2015; Jang 2009). Because parties focus on mobilizing those who are most likely to vote for them (Huckfeldt and Sprague 1992), they often strategically pass over immigrant populations as being unlikely to vote at all. However, this immigrant effect does not explain the differences in attention between Asian and Latinx voters. Asian American voters are often overlooked by parties and scholars, leaving many questions about their political behavior.

### *Pan-Asian Identity*

Existing theories of social identity claim that a strong group identity can enhance political participation and engagement of certain groups by providing cues and strategies for people to follow (Fowler and Kam 2007; Bernstein 2005; Ben-Bassat and Daham 2012). Group identity can be described as a sense of belonging, group cohesion, and a personal connection to group experiences (Ashforth and Mael 1989). If a social group that an individual identifies with is involved in politics, the individual is more likely to be involved in politics themselves, especially when the shared identity lies in the group's race and/or ethnicity. Racial group identity can create a collective group consciousness, where members of the group believe that what happens to the group as a whole will affect them personally. Racial group identity can also cause group members to believe that their race is a more salient aspect of their identity (Philpot, Shaw, and McGowen 2009). This identity can be self-created by the various ethnicities to coalesce into a collective unit or can be imposed by self-serving politicians and organizations. Examples of this effect include distinct African tribes that politicians have lumped together to maximize mobilization efforts (Posner 2004). Pan-ethnic identities often serve strategic purposes related to maximizing the group's political influence and effects.

Similarly, a pan-Asian identity serves to unite diverse groups of people and cultures with shared experiences under a common name, although the identity is usually aimed at a political goal. Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders, though ethnically diverse, are often lumped together into a single pan-Asian identity to maximize their political influence (Kim 2015; Espiritu 1992; Omi and Winant 1994; Xu 2002). Because Asian Americans are typically more assimilated than other immigrant groups, a pan-Asian identity has varying effects on civic participation depending on the political context at the time of identity formation (Junn and Masuoka 2008). Political parties and organizations can

strategically turn a latent racial identity into a salient one to appeal to voter preferences. Studies have shown that increased use of a pan-Asian identity by political parties can increase civic participation and socialization by strengthening feelings of trust and understanding between group members (Sadhvani 2020; Kim 2015; Chen and Nakazawa 2017; Junn and Masuoka 2008). People who hold a pan-Asian identity can be more politically active by participating in elections and social movements. Accordingly, a pan-Asian identity can serve a useful purpose in bringing diverse communities of Asian Americans together to achieve a common goal.

### *Racialized Effects of COVID-19*

More recently, a pan-Asian identity has been used by organizations and individuals to mobilize Asian American activists in the wake of heightened racism from COVID-19. The COVID-19 pandemic significantly increased racialized comments towards people of Asian descent because the virus originated in China. Many people viewed Asians as an easily identifiable embodiment of the pandemic, and targeted fear and xenophobia towards Asians (Jun, Kim, and Woo 2021; Li and Nicholson 2021; Chan, Kim, and Leung 2021; Gover, Harper, and Langton 2020). The initial reactions of politicians and private individuals who associated the virus with Asia reignited racist and xenophobic attitudes towards Asians, causing hate crimes against Asian Americans nationwide to rise significantly (Tessler, Choi, and Kao 2020; Gover, Harper, and Langton 2020; Jun, Kim, and Woo 2021). Consequently, the pandemic has also created a stronger pan-ethnic identity that has united various Asian ethnicities to combat anti-Asian racism (Li and Nicholson 2021; Jun, Kim, and Woo 2021). Increased attention to Asian Americans with COVID-19 caused an increase in racial group identity. Organizations such as Stop Asian American Pacific Islander Hate were formed to unite the larger Asian community under a common identity and purpose of reporting and reducing anti-Asian hate crimes nationwide.

The interaction between coronavirus-related racism and a stronger pan-Asian identity has led to greater Asian American activism as people are more willing to speak out against racism as a collective unit. Masouka (2006) stated that racial discrimination and political involvement encourages pan-ethnic identity for Asian Americans, which highlights the importance of racial context for the political participation of minorities. The relevance of COVID-19 as a racial threat against Asians has led to a need for a stronger group identity, which in turn could have contributed to the increases in voter turnout in 2020. Some studies have primarily focused on anti-Asian racism and the rise in Asian American activism at the beginning of the pandemic but have not analyzed voter turnout as a clear indicator of increased political participation among Asian Americans (Li and Nicholson 2021; Jun, Kim, and Woo 2021). A few studies suggest that the relative strength of a group identity will increase the efficiency of group appeals by increasing voter turnout (Valenzuela and Michelson 2016; Kim 2015), which suggests that racial group identity could have impacted voter turnout and political participation overall.

Although voter turnout overall surprisingly increased in 2020 despite concerns over the COVID-19 pandemic (Santana, Rama, and Bértoa 2020; Baccini, Brodeur, and Weymouth 2021; Galdieri, Lucas, and Sisco 2021), Asian Americans saw the highest rate of increase in voter turnout across all racial groups. To determine what caused this sudden increase in voter turnout rates, I examine both party contacting and a salient group identity caused by reactions to the coronavirus as factors that led to the record-high turnout rates for Asian Americans. Relatively few studies have analyzed party contacting for Asian American voters (Wong 2005; Kim 2015; Ramírez and Wong 2012), and none have yet studied the effect of party contacting on turnout rates for Asian Americans in the 2020 election. Furthermore, while a few recent studies have examined the effects of COVID-19 on strengthening a pan-Asian identity generally (Jun, Kim, and Woo 2021; Gover, Harper, and Langton 2020; Tessler, Choi, and Kao 2020; Li and Nicholson 2021), no study has yet researched the heightened group identity as a cause of increased voter turnout of Asian Americans in 2020. The 2020 election was especially important for Asian American political activity because of the politicization of COVID-19 that largely reignited anti-Asian racism, which reframed the model minority into a physical threat (Li and Nicholson 2021). Because a stronger pan-Asian identity became salient due to racial responses to the pandemic, the racial context and importance of Asian American political participation likely shifted in 2020 compared to previous election years.

## Hypotheses

I theorize that the increase in party contacting towards Asian Americans combined with the spread of a pan-Asian identity due to the racialization of COVID-19 mobilized Asian American voters in 2020 in an unprecedented way.

I expect party contacting and racial group identity to both play important roles in increasing minority voter turnout. I hypothesize that racial minorities who were contacted by a major political party leading up to the election and who also have a stronger sense of racial group identity were more likely to vote (H1). I assess my hypothesis for Asian, Black, and Latinx voters from the 2016 and 2020 ANES data.

I also expect Asian American group identity to be stronger in 2020 than in 2016 (Hypothesis 2a). In line with this hypothesis, I expect that racial group identity will be a stronger indicator of Asian American voter turnout in 2020 than in 2016 (H2b). The 2020 election was important for Asian Americans because of racialized responses to COVID-19 and subsequent hate crimes against Asians that brought them into the forefront of the political atmosphere.

Finally, I hypothesize that the combination of party contacting and racial identity together increased Asian American voter turnout in 2016 (H3a) and that the effect is stronger in 2020 because of higher racial identity (H3b). Although I speculate that this increase was due to the racialized effects of COVID-19, I am unable to test this hypothesis with the given ANES survey data because the survey does not directly ask respondents about the pandemic.

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## Method and Design

I use data from the American National Election Study (ANES) from 2016 and 2020 to examine variables for voter turnout and party contacting for each racial group, focusing on data for Asian Americans. I chose to use ANES because the survey asks respondents about the level of racial discrimination they perceive as a group and individually. I use these questions to create an index of racial group identity. In my analysis of Asian American voters, I rely on responses from people who self-reported as belonging to the “Asian or Native Hawaiian/other Pacific Islander, non-Hispanic alone” racial group as specified in the ANES survey. I also compare my initial analysis of Asian Americans to White, Black, and Latinx voters.

My dependent variable is self-reported voter turnout from ANES in 2016 and 2020. My independent variables are party contacting and measures of group identity strength, also self-reported by survey respondents in ANES. Voter turnout is measured as a dichotomous variable for whether the respondent voted in the 2020 election. Party contact is also a dichotomous variable for whether the respondent was contacted by either of the two major political parties before the election. I measured racial group identity by creating an index with the average values from four questions in the ANES survey. I examined questions that asked about the importance of being Asian to one’s identity (measured from 0 being “not at all” to 4 being “extremely important”), how much what happens to other Asians will affect one’s life (measured from 0 being “not at all” to 4 being “a lot”), the perceived level of discrimination against Asians (measured from 0 being “none at all” to 4 being “a great deal”), and how important it is for Asians to work together to change laws that are unfair to Asians (measured from 0 being “not at all” to 4 being “extremely important”) as reported by ANES. Because ANES categorizes all Asian ethnicities and Pacific Islanders into one large racial group, I consider these factors to be indicators of a pan-Asian identity rather than identities about a specific ethnic group. The racial group identity index variable ranges from 0 being no sense of group identity to 4 being the highest sense of group identity. I also created similar racial group identity variables for White, Black, and Latinx voters.

### *Statistical Modeling*

I test my hypotheses using a series of probit regressions for the interaction between party contacting and Asian group identity on Asian American voter turnout across 2016 and 2020. I chose a probit model because voter turnout is a dichotomous variable. In these regressions, I control for gender, age, income, education level, marital status, and religiosity. I then run the same regressions for White, Black, and Latinx voters.

After establishing the interaction between party contacting and racial group identity for each racial group, I focus on the relationship for Asian American voters. I conduct another regression with the interaction between party contacting and racial group identity on Asian American voters in 2016 and 2020 to determine if and how the relationship changed between the election years. The model showed the relationship was linear in 2016 and parabolic in 2020, meaning that people who were contacted by



a political party and had the lowest and highest racial group identities were the most likely to vote. To better fit the initial data model visualization, I added a quadratic term for Asian group identity in 2020. A quadratic model in the 2016 data did not follow the initial data visualization and did not yield any statistically significant results. I then show the probability of voter turnout based on different values of Asian group identity in marginal effects plots.

## Results

### *Changes in Voter Turnout, Party Contacting, and Group Identity*

Based on the ANES self-reported data, average voter turnout increased substantially in 2020. Moreover, voter turnout for each racial group reported in the survey increased as well. Average party contacting, however, decreased. These results likely come from the decrease in party contacting towards White voters. Party contacting towards Asian, Black, and Latinx voters increased slightly in 2020 compared to 2016.

From 2016 to 2020, Asian Americans had the highest increase in voter turnout rates. Asian American voter turnout increased from 69.64% in 2016 to 83.33% in 2020, a 13.69 percentage point increase (see Table 1). The average increase in voter turnout for all races surveyed was an 8.32 percentage point increase, jumping from 77.81% in 2016 to 86.13% in 2020. Compared to the average, Asian American voter turnout was substantial in 2020.

Table 1: Demographics of Voters in 2016 and 2020

	Average	Asian American	White	African American	Latinx
2016 Voter Turnout	77.81%	69.64%	80.68%	78.92%	62.67%
2020 Voter Turnout	86.13%	83.33%	88.62%	81.68%	74.06%
2016 Contacted by Major Political Party	32.32%	26.31%	33.4%	33.43%	26.81%
2020 Contacted by Major Political Party	30.67%	27.56%	30.22%	33.64%	29.15%
2016 Average Racial Group Identity	---	1.97	1.57	3.14	2.64
2020 Average Racial Group Identity	---	2.11	1.47	3.33	2.67

Party contacting towards Asian Americans in 2020 also increased, as expected, though the increase was slight (see Table 1). The 1.25 percentage point increase in party contacting from 26.31% in 2016 to 27.56% in 2020 was a small increase and likely did not solely contribute to the high turnout rates. Asian Americans still saw the lowest party contacting rates overall. As a result, some other factors likely contributed to the increase in Asian American voter turnout in 2020. As discussed previously, a heightened sense of racial group identity among Asian Americans likely resulted from the racialization of COVID-19.

Racial group identity for Asian Americans also increased in 2020, confirming H2a. Asian American racial identity rose from an average of 1.97 in 2016 to an average of 2.11 in 2020 (see Table 1). The 0.14-point average increase is among the higher increases for racial group identity between the election years. Average African American racial identity increased by 0.19 points, which is a significant increase in group identity. Racial group identity generally does not increase in a short period without cause because group-level identity should be relatively stable (Junn and Masuoka 2008; Fowler and Kam 2007). For comparison, the average Latinx racial identity rose by only 0.03 points from 2016 to 2020. Although Asian Americans saw slight increases in party contacting and racial group identity in 2020, the two factors individually likely did not affect the high voter turnout rate. However, the interaction of party contacting and racial group identity could have increased voter turnout, which is examined below.

### *Interaction of Party Contacting and Racial Group Identity*

Overall, Asian American voter turnout increases as people who have a higher sense of group identity are contacted by the major political parties. Table 2 is a probit model that shows that the interaction between the two factors increases turnout for Asian Americans at the 90% statistical significance level. Among Asian Americans who were contacted by a political party, those who have a one unit increase in racial group identity show a 0.463 increase in the z-score for the probability of voting. An increase in the z-score for the predicted probability indicates a higher probability of voting in these regressions. To test whether party contacting and Asian group identity affected 2020 turnout rates, I ran another regression examining the effects of party contacting and racial group identity for Asian, White, Black, and Latinx voters. Latinx voters are also more likely to vote if people with higher racial group identities are contacted by a major party, offering support for Hypothesis 1. Latinx voters who are contacted by a political party and have a one unit increase in racial group identity show a 0.267 increase in the z-score for the probability of voting (see Table 2). The difference between the Asian and Latinx voters suggests differences beyond group identity or migrant effects from political parties. The interaction of party contacting and racial group identity is a slightly stronger indicator of turnout for Asian Americans.

As mentioned earlier, Asian American and Latinx voters are typically ignored by the major political parties in contacting efforts. Voter turnout rates for White and Black voters, however, are not significantly affected by the interaction of party contacting and racial group identity. The interaction between party contacting and racial group

identity, then, appears to be an important factor in voter turnout for minority groups that are traditionally overlooked by the major political parties. The results support H1 as it relates to Asian and Latinx voters but not to Black voters, suggesting that there are different nuances to consider in studying voter turnout based on different racial groups.

Table 2: Effects of Party Contacting and Racial Group Identity in 2016 and 2020 on Voter Turnout

Combined Effects from 2016 and 2020	Asian American	White	African American	Latinx
Party contact	-0.439 (0.482)	0.414*** (0.112)	0.196 (0.516)	-0.304 (0.393)
Racial group identity	-0.0158 (0.110)	-0.104*** (0.0305)	0.277*** (0.0863)	-0.0184 (0.0767)
Party contact and racial group identity	0.463* (0.249)	-0.0222 (0.0627)	0.0695 (0.160)	0.267* (0.146)
Age	-0.0234 (0.0575)	0.200*** (0.0138)	0.274*** (0.0409)	0.162*** (0.0363)
Female	-0.0137 (0.172)	0.131*** (0.0455)	0.272** (0.124)	0.0726 (0.111)
Religiosity—ever attend	-0.0337 (0.172)	0.144*** (0.0452)	0.137 (0.123)	0.0670 (0.110)
Education level	0.0577 (0.0583)	0.200*** (0.0157)	0.0726 (0.0442)	0.209*** (0.0388)
Total family income	0.0501 (0.0446)	0.105*** (0.0130)	0.174*** (0.0397)	0.0843*** (0.0313)
Marital status	0.172 (0.181)	0.173*** (0.0487)	0.0581 (0.148)	0.0673 (0.118)
Constant	0.246 (0.398)	-0.892*** (0.0953)	-2.011*** (0.345)	-0.998*** (0.273)
Observations	284	5,331	722	637

Standard errors in parentheses  
 \*\*\* p<0.01, \*\* p<0.05, \* p<0.1

### *Party Contacting and Asian American Group Identity*

Once I established that the interaction between party contacting and racial group identity was an important factor in increasing voter turnout rates for Asian Americans, I focused on if and how the relationship changed in 2016 and 2020 (see Table 3). Initial data analysis showed a largely linear relationship between voter turnout and Asian group identity in 2016, as confirmed by the marginal effects plot in Figure 1. Accordingly, I conducted another probit regression with a simple interaction between party contacting and racial group identity for Asian American voters in 2016.

The relationship between turnout and the interaction was linear in 2016, meaning that among those who were contacted by a political party in 2016 and had a higher sense of racial group identity were more likely to vote than those who did not have a strong sense of group identity. However, initial model visualization showed that the relationship in 2020 appeared to shift from a linear relationship to a quadratic relationship, indicating that those who were contacted by a political party and had the highest and lowest senses of racial group identity were most likely to vote. Asian Americans with a moderate sense of racial group identity in 2020 were among the least likely to vote. Because a quadratic term better fits the model in 2020, I ran another probit regression with the interaction between party contacting and a quadratic term for Asian group identity in 2020. The quadratic relationship for Asian group identity in 2020 is confirmed by the marginal effects plot in Figure 2.

Table 3 shows differences in Asian American voter turnout rates in 2016 and 2020 from the effects of party contacting and racial group identity. In 2016, Asian Americans who were contacted by a major political party were less likely to vote. Asians who were contacted by a political party showed a 1.311 decrease in z-score for the probability of voting. This finding is statistically significant at the 90% confidence level. As party contacting has typically been considered an effective method of increasing turnout rates, this finding holds interesting implications. Party contacting alone seems to be an ineffective and detrimental method for increasing turnout among Asian American voters.

Asian Americans who were contacted by a political party and had a higher sense of group identity in 2016, however, were more likely to vote in the presidential election (see Figure 1). Among Asian Americans who were contacted by a political party, a one unit increase in racial group identity was correlated with a 0.915 increase in z-score for the probability of voting. This finding is statistically significant at the 95% confidence level. Therefore, I find support for H3a, showing that Asian American who were contacted by a political party and held higher group attachment were more likely to vote in 2016.

Additionally, Asian identity alone was a stronger indicator of voter turnout in 2020 than it was in 2016. The results for Asian identity on voter turnout are not significant in 2016, whereas the findings are significant in 2020. This finding supports H2b, suggesting that racial identity alone was a stronger determinant of voter turnout in 2020 than it was in 2016. However, the same simple interaction between party contacting and group identity was not a significant indicator of Asian American voter turnout in 2020. Rather, the quadratic term for Asian group identity alone was a significant factor of voter turnout at the 90% confidence level (see Table 3). This finding means that Asian Americans who had the highest and lowest levels of racial group identity were more likely to vote than those who held moderate levels of group identity (see Figure 2). Though the interaction between party contacting and Asian group identity-squared in 2020 is positive, it is not statistically significant. Accordingly, I do not find support for H3b in the regression. The quadratic term for Asian identity was a more reliable indicator of 2020 voter turnout than the interaction of party contacting and Asian group identity.

Table 3: Asian American Voter Turnout with Quadratic Terms for Party Contacting and Group Identity

Asian American Voter Turnout	2016	2020
Party contact	-1.311* (0.769)	5.930 (5.865)
Asian racial group identity	0.0458 (0.155)	-2.495* (1.355)
Party contact and Asian racial group identity	0.915** (0.437)	-6.468 (6.412)
Asian racial group identity <sup>2</sup>		0.584* (0.312)
Party contact and Asian racial group identity <sup>2</sup>		1.842 (1.745)
Age	-0.0521 (0.0798)	0.0414 (0.0982)
Female	-0.309 (0.251)	0.187 (0.275)
Religiosity—ever attend	-0.0769 (0.248)	0.134 (0.288)
Education level	0.0113 (0.0796)	0.0789 (0.100)
Total family income	0.00547 (0.0677)	0.133* (0.0703)
Marital status	-0.0415 (0.270)	0.316 (0.297)
Constant	0.606 (0.551)	1.868 (1.420)
Observations	127	157

Standard errors in parentheses

\*\*\* p&lt;0.01, \*\* p&lt;0.05, \* p&lt;0.1

The quadratic term for Asian group identity was a significant indicator of voter turnout in 2020 (see Figure 2). In 2020, a one unit increase in Asian identity was correlated with a 2.496 unit decrease in the z-score for the probability of voting until a certain point, at which a one unit increase in group identity was associated with a 0.584 unit increase in the z-score for the probability of voting. Asian Americans who had either the lowest sense of group identity or the highest sense of group identity were the most likely to vote in the 2020 election. People who had a moderate sense of group identity, however, were the least likely to vote in the election. Higher turnout rates for people with a greater sense of group identity is expected, as explained above. However, the high turnout rates for people with the lowest sense of group identity is an

unexpected finding. For reference, Table 4 shows the results of the probit regressions in 2016 and 2020 without the interaction between party contacting and group identity and the quadratic variable for racial group identity.

Table 4: Additional Results from 2016 and 2020

	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)
Asian American Voter Turnout	2016	2020	2016 With Interaction	2020 With Interaction	2016 With Quadratic	2020 With Quadratic
Party Contact	0.280 (0.285)	0.609** (0.309)	-1.311* (0.769)	0.406 (0.814)	0.277 (0.286)	0.701** (0.325)
Asian racial group identity	0.204 (0.139)	-0.0532 (0.159)	0.0458 (0.155)	-0.0749 (0.179)	-0.0464 (0.465)	-2.971** (1.315)
Party contact and Asian racial group identity			0.915** (0.437)	0.101 (0.379)		
Age	-0.0399 (0.0784)	0.00746 (0.0916)	-0.0521 (0.0798)	0.0107 (0.0923)	-0.0411 (0.0785)	0.0263 (0.0961)
Female	-0.313 (0.247)	0.143 (0.258)	-0.309 (0.251)	0.140 (0.258)	-0.314 (0.247)	0.175 (0.270)
Religiosity—ever attend	0.00196 (0.241)	0.149 (0.267)	-0.0769 (0.248)	0.144 (0.268)	0.0136 (0.242)	0.154 (0.282)
Education level	0.0178 (0.0788)	0.0776 (0.0940)	0.0113 (0.0796)	0.0782 (0.0939)	0.0231 (0.0794)	0.0843 (0.0994)
Total family income	-0.00202 (0.0669)	0.0952 (0.0643)	0.00547 (0.0677)	0.0961 (0.0644)	-0.00219 (0.0668)	0.128* (0.0691)
Marital status	-0.0588 (0.265)	0.389 (0.281)	-0.0415 (0.270)	0.384 (0.281)	-0.0449 (0.266)	0.313 (0.294)
Asian racial group identity <sup>2</sup>					0.0662 (0.118)	0.712** (0.306)
Constant	0.234 (0.518)	-0.0995 (0.629)	0.606 (0.551)	-0.0646 (0.643)	0.395 (0.594)	2.302* (1.338)
Observations	127	157	127	157	127	157

Standard errors in parentheses

\*\*\* p&lt;0.01, \*\* p&lt;0.05, \* p&lt;0.1

Interestingly, none of the control variables were significant indicators of Asian American voter turnout, except for total family income in 2020. Among the variables studied, racial group identity was the only significant factor in higher Asian American turnout rates in 2020. Given that I controlled for measures traditionally viewed as reliable indicators of voter turnout, the findings suggest that factors of voter turnout vary across racial minorities.

Figure 1

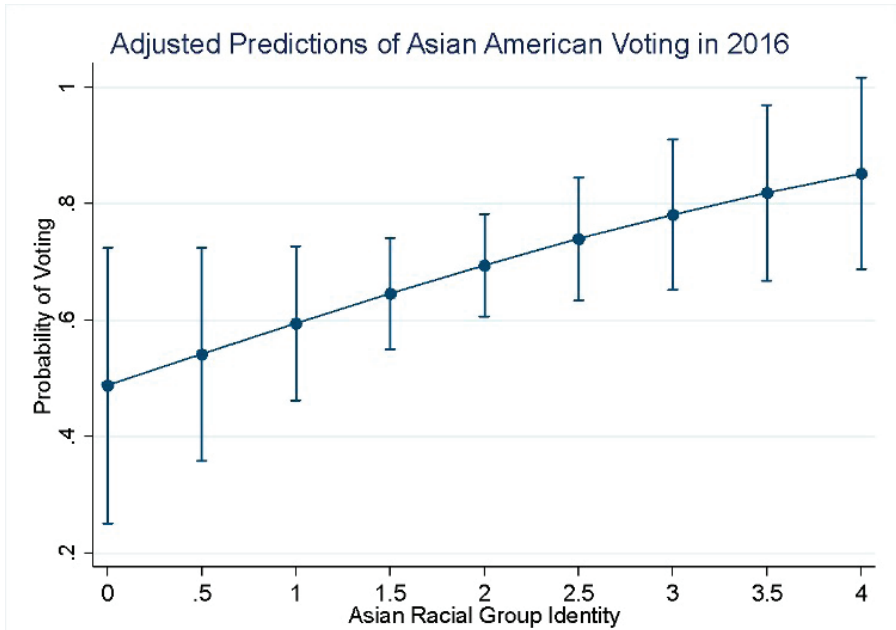
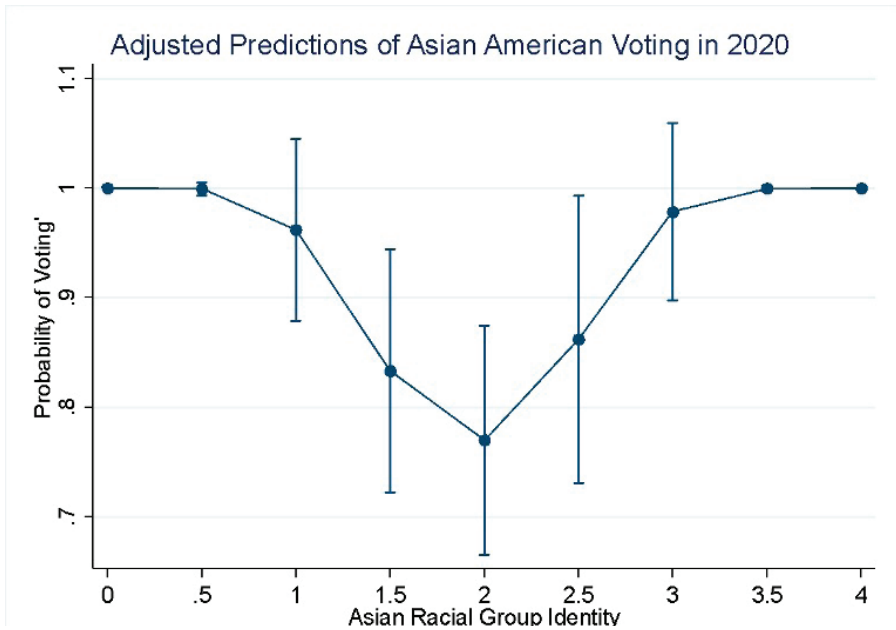


Figure 2



Furthermore, I expected to find the interaction between party contacting and group identity to be a significant determinant of voter turnout in both election years. Although this interaction was significant in 2016, it was not significant in determining Asian American voter turnout in 2020. Even with the quadratic term for Asian group identity, the interaction between party contacting and racial group identity was not a significant determinant of voter turnout. Racial group identity for Asian Americans was a more significant indicator of voter turnout in 2020. Asian group identity, then, seems to be a more important factor in voter turnout now than it was previously.

## Conclusion and Discussion

The interaction between party contacting and racial group identity appears to affect Asian American voter turnout in some circumstances. Larger social and political context affects Asian American voter turnout. As such, political parties can only do so much in terms of mobilization. In 2016, the interaction effect was significant, meaning that among those contacted by a political party, people with higher racial group attachment were more likely to vote in the election. In 2020, however, the effect of party contacting diminished, and racial group identity became stronger in influencing voter turnout rates. I found no evidence that the interaction between party contacting and group identity increased Asian American voter turnout rates in 2020.

However, Asian Americans who reported the highest and lowest racial group attachment held the highest probability of voting in 2020. Although I expected those with higher group identities to have higher probabilities of voting, the finding that those with the lowest group attachment also have the highest turnout rates is unexpected. I suspect that exogenous circumstances led to the shift for people with the lowest group identity holding the highest probability of voter turnout in 2020. Additional research could corroborate these findings and provide an analysis as to why people with the lowest sense of group identity were more likely to vote in the election.

A limitation to the research is that respondents in the ANES data do not report what specific messages parties use to mobilize voters. Methods of party contacting may not involve racial messages at all. As a result, I must assume that party contacting in any form caused Asian Americans to consider their racial identity, regardless of if the messages themselves were racial. Because racial identity was more salient in 2020 without a significant effect from party contacting, I also assume that political messages in general caused Asian Americans to think about their racial identities.

Because the relationship for Asian racial group identity and party contacting shifted significantly between 2016 and 2020, the data suggests that larger contextual factors played an important role in the sudden increase in voter turnout. An obvious change in the political and social environment in 2020 was COVID-19. The pandemic drastically altered the political and social landscape and brought Asians to the forefront. Because Asians were initially portrayed as the cause of the virus by politicians and groups, the pandemic was highly racialized against Asians. Consequently, Asians experienced a



shocking increase in hate crimes, and COVID-19 likely caused Asians to unite through linked fate and heightened group identity.

Although the findings suggest that party contacting and racial group identity can increase Asian American voter turnout, the results are not conclusive. ANES surveys a limited number of Asian voters, with only 148 Asian respondents in 2016 and 284 respondents in 2020. When adding in control variables, the sample size falls to 127 in 2016 and 157 in 2020. The small sample size could affect the statistical significance of the results for the interaction. Furthermore, self-reported voter turnout and party contacting rates carry a possibility of being skewed due to respondents' desire to appear more engaged and civic-minded. Additional research that confirms voter turnout rates could corroborate the initial findings for the interaction between party contacting and racial group identity.

The insignificance of the chosen control variables for Asian American voter turnout also reflects the dearth of information on minority turnout. The control variables, which are typically viewed as strong indicators of voter turnout, were all significant indicators of White voter turnout, as shown in Table 2. The number of significant indicators of voter turnout decreased for Black and Latinx voters and fell substantially for Asian voters. The only significant finding in the analysis for Asian American voters was the interaction between party contacting and racial group identity. These findings indicate that factors regarded as typical determinants of voter turnout are largely tailored to reflect White voters. Currently recognized indicators of voter turnout, then, are likely not as widely applicable to all minority groups. Especially because Asian Americans fit into the existing predictions of higher education and income but have lower turnout rates, previously unconsidered factors may influence voter turnout for different racial groups. Further studies on minority voters may need to consider other nontraditional factors besides the typical indicators of high turnout.

Future research should examine how party contacting, Asian group identity, and voter turnout differs for each Asian American ethnicity. Although voter turnout for Asian Americans generally increased in 2020, ANES does not provide data on specific ethnicities. Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders are grouped into one racial category, which causes problems because the groups have diverse backgrounds and face different issues. The common Western idea of Asians being restricted to East Asians rather than all diverse Asian ethnicities also contributes to the difficulty of studying the various ethnic groups. Moreover, studies could examine the specific effects of COVID-19 on Asian political participation. Because ANES did not ask respondents about the pandemic, another survey that focuses on Asian Americans could determine if and how the racialization of the coronavirus affected Asian American voter turnout.

The findings in this study have implications for future Asian American voter turnout. Depending on the larger social and political context, Asian racial group identity could continue to be a salient factor in increasing turnout rates. Additional research could examine the long-lasting effects of COVID-19 on Asian group identity as well as its effects on other social groups. Because Asian American voter turnout is less influenced by factors such as higher education and income levels than are other racial

groups, research on Asian voters may require a different perspective. In the 2024 presidential election, Asian voter turnout could shift based on the larger social context and the role of the political parties in bringing Asians closer to the center of the political atmosphere. Asian American voter turnout can change depending on the broader social and political context as well as contacting from political parties. Parties can maximize their roles in Asian American voter mobilization by increasing contacting efforts and paying attention to the general atmosphere around racial group identity.

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